doorways of abandoned store-fronts....

Johnny passed by his own thing store.... It was dying too.... The love-death.... Gaping dressers.... Gutted armchairs.... Abandoned on the curb.... Pieces of garbage blowing down Thing Street.... Torn signs.... BOOKS 25 CENTS....

Thanks to Romeo and his affairs.... Thing Street was haunted by them.... Ever since that meeting with Moll.... Johnny striding down Thing Street.... Enjoying the weather.... A fine spring day.... Even if he was on his way to the thing store.... Deliveries....

He met Moll just as he emerged from the underpass.... Grand Ole Nestor Doc Joseph Workman's aesthetically-pleasing steam-age railroad trestle.... The moat that separated Thing Street from the rest of humanity....

She was standing right there in bright leotards.... Under a pylon.... Like she'd just emerged from the bushes.... On the former grounds of the Mercy Reformatory and Home for Unwed Mothers....

Mother-Fucks.... Johnny muttered under his breath....

Off to the store? Moll asked.... Yeah.... Johnny paused.... I'm never going back there.... Moll took a drag on her ciggy.... Yeah? Why?.... She exhaled through her button nose.... Her hair was bright orange.... Her nylon wind-breaker accentuated her full physique.... Romeo's playing head games.... He's fooling around with things' heads....

Johnny remembered the plastic skull with day-glo eyes.... He hung it in an abandoned bird cage.... Carlotta had wanted it really bad.... He called it MR BONES.... Games....

That bitch for one thing.... She meant Carlotta.... Moll said Carlotta was talking about him.... With that weirdo Porko.... And Romeo too.... How he'd fired him.... For bringing the heat around.... Later they all had coffee in THE SLIME.... Moll.... Romeo.... Carlotta.... Carlotta let on that Johnny must have done something really aweful....

The Beautiful Carlotta.... She called herself a web-site designer.... She was designing all right.... Not that kind of web.... She was in a shelter (again).... With her kids....

Johnny was no Puritan.... Carlotta was twenty-something.... Those kids of hers.... He didn't give a shit about them.... She was bad for business.... Romeo should have been out buying more things for him to sell.... So far as Johnny was concerned....

Carlotta wasn't the only one.... There was Dr. Trixie Sane.... Anne Bolyn.... Mrs. Howard Hughes.... Gunga Dinn.... Heywood-Wakefield.... Mahogany Dining-Room Suite.... Izitolde.... Rogers Cable.... Upright Piano.... Any number of street-walkers....

Dr. Trixie Sane had a hygiene problem.... Never washed her hair.... Stank.... Johnny remembered how she threw a fit in the store.... After he balled her out for never picking up her things.... Her buffet..... Her desk.... None of it paid for.... Really it was because she wanted her Romeo.... She lost control when Johnny wouldn't give her his number.... He didn't have it.... She didn't believe him.... Got personal.... Balled him out.... He put a hand on her shoulder.... Eased her out.... Screaming.... Frantically pulling at the door.... Gimme Romeo's number.... Jack (Was) Every Inch A. Sailor warned him.... She wouldn't be through with him until it was established.... Irrefragably proven.... He'd put his hand on her pussy.... Muttering obscenities....

Anne Boleyn.... Had a taste for head.... For pulling it off.... A regular head-hunter.... Only she hadn't scored in twenty years.... Had to be handled gently.... Tense biter.... Busy schedule.... Lady Jane waiting in the wings....

Who was Mrs. Howard Hughes.... Howard took a walk in the desert.... Many impersonated.... Nobody equalled.... She moped around her public relations firm.... Making fortunes.... Her husband left her plenty of those.... Boring.... High-class.... Disinterested....